

# ROAD TO DEMOCRACY



Afghan Elections





*Front cover: In the southern Afghani city of Kandahar, a woman displays her voter registration card as she waits to cast her ballot at a polling station for women, and a long line of voters stretches around the corner from a polling station for men.*

# ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

For some in Afghanistan, the road to democracy began in the cold and dark, as early as 3 a.m., on October 9, 2004, as they awoke and prepared to travel for hours to polling stations. In doing so, they made history: defying threats from the Taliban and casting their votes in the country's first-ever democratic presidential election.

For the people of Afghanistan, the election was a dramatic milestone on the long, often hard road to freedom and democratic government. But they are not traveling this road alone. Over recent decades, peoples throughout the world have increasingly traveled the road to democracy.

As President Bush said in an address to the National Endowment for Democracy in November 2003, "We've witnessed, in little over a generation, the swiftest advance of freedom in the 2,500-year story of democracy."

Democracy's advance has been neither certain nor foreordained, but it does reflect the power and universality of its fundamental precepts. Individual freedom, rule of law, human rights, representative government, legitimate elections, civil society: these principles have been embodied in the great democratic movement that historians may well mark as the most significant phenomenon of the past generation — and as Afghanistan demonstrates, for the next generation as well.

The global progress of democracy refutes the skeptics who claimed that democracy was a uniquely Western phenomenon, ill-suited to other regions. Through the dedication, vision, and sacrifice of millions,

democracy has taken root in recent years in Eastern and Northern Europe, in Asia, and in the Americas — now largely a hemisphere of democracies.

Although the principles of democracy are universal, its practice is as varied as the cultures in which it thrives. Democracies function as constitutional monarchies and federal republics. They have flourished in times of peace and prosperity — and survived in times of war, poverty, and internal division. Once dismissed by some as a luxury that only affluent societies could afford, freedom and democracy are now recognized as critical to sustained economic development and prosperity.

Secretary of State Colin Powell cites the experience of one region in a March 2004 address:

*Asians have proven that modernization isn't the same thing as Westernization.... We Americans came to such ideals through our European heritage, but Asians came to the same ideals through their own heritages in their own ways.... And today the ideas of democracy, of market economics, of human freedom, of the dignity of men and women, all within the rule of law — these are very powerful, beyond any physical scale; so powerful that they are setting roots in Asian countries with past political forms as diverse as South Korea's military government and Mongolia's communist rule.*

## FREE AND NOT FREE

Freedom House, a U.S. nonpartisan organization, has been tracking global trends in electoral democracy and freedom in a series of annual surveys called Freedom in the World since 1972. Freedom House rates nations as "Free," "Partly Free," and "Not Free" using a broad range of political and social measures.

❑ *"Free" nations — genuine electoral democracies — are not perfect models of democratic government, according to Freedom House, but they are societies where free, meaningful political competition*

*by one or more factors that Freedom House lists as corruption, weak rule of law, dominance by a single political party or group, and ethnic or religious strife.*

❑ *"Not Free" nations lack any meaningful political freedom; citizens often see their civil liberties and human rights systematically abused or denied.*

Democracy has maintained its momentum in recent years. Freedom House reports that, over the past three years, 51 countries registered gains in the measures of freedom and democracy while 27 nations



*and expression exist; basic human rights are protected; and the rule of law practiced.*

❑ *"Partly Free" nations possess limited political and civil rights that are often compromised*

experienced setbacks.

In other words, during the past three years, freedom's gains have outpaced its declines at a rate of almost two to one.



Afghanistan's 18 presidential candidates are shown in the order in which they appeared on the ballot. Top row from left: Abdul Latif Pedram, Hamid Karzai, Homayoon Shah Asifi, Mir Mohammed Mahfoz Nidaie, Mohammed Mohaqeq, and Sayed Ishaq Gilani.

Middle row from left: Abdul Satar Sirat, Abdul Hafiz Mansoor, Ghulam Farooq Hjrabi, Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai, Abdul Hasib Aryan, and Wakil Mangul. Bottom Row from left: Abdul Hadi Khalizai, Mohammed Ibrahim Rashid, Mohammed Yunus Qanooni, Massooda Jalal, Sayed Abdul Hadi Dabir, and Abdul Rashid Dostum.

Below: Workers in a United Nations warehouse in Kabul count posters used to promote the elections.

### THE ELECTIONS TEST

All democratic nations hold elections, but not all elections are democratic. The test of any society traveling the road to freedom is not the technical challenge of holding elections — although the logistics can be formidable — but of ensuring that the public sees the elections as free and fair.

Elections are an indispensable element of any democracy. Why? Because elections are the chief means by which the citizenry gives (or denies) its consent to the government and its policies.

What are the standards by which

hold a certain political view or faith.

**□ FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ORGANIZATION.** *Democracies protect the right of individuals and parties to organize peacefully, campaign freely, speak openly, and criticize those in power without fear of reprisal or intimidation.*

**□ INDEPENDENT AND TRAINED ELECTIONS OFFICIALS.** *Those who register voters, oversee elections, and count the votes must be independent and nonpartisan officials whom all voters trust.*

**□ SECRET BALLOT.** *Transparency and openness is a hallmark of democratic government — except*



we can judge whether elections are free and fair?

**□ UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE.**

*In general, all adult men and women should be eligible to register and vote. Governments can establish residency and identification requirements, but democracies do not restrict minorities from voting, nor permit voting only for those who are literate, privileged, own property, or*



*in the act of voting itself. Election officials can assist voters, but a person's vote must be secret, so that the choice can never be used for or against the individual.*

**□ COMPETITIVE.**

*Elections with a token opposition that, in actuality, is controlled or otherwise manipulated by the party in power are not democratic. Elections are the means by which societies*

Above: A teacher in the village of Guldara hands to students election posters provided by the U.N. Development Program.

Below: Women provide thumbprints in order to receive voter registration cards at a mosque in Kabul.

*make choices about public policy that have real consequences for their citizens; they are the process for resolving differences, not for pretending they don't exist.*

❑ **PERIODIC.** *Democracies never elect dictators or presidents-for-life. Whether elections are held on a regular schedule or when a government loses support in the parliament, elections are a regular feature of every democratic government.*

❑ **DEFINITIVE.** *In a democracy, elections determine who holds power under the laws and*

*democracy is not a guarantee, but only a promise that people can shape their own lives and, together, build a better future for themselves and their children.*

In his address to the United Nations on September 21, 2004, President Bush said:

*Because we believe in human dignity, peaceful nations must stand for the advance of democracy. No other system of government has done more to protect minorities, to secure the rights of labor, to raise the status of women, or to channel human energy to the pursuits of*



*constitution of that country. They are the means for a peaceful transfer of power. Thus, elections are not merely symbolic, nor do they simply ratify the choices made by some other unelected body. Through elections, the people hold the government accountable for its actions and policies.*

Elections may be a benchmark of democracy, but democracies will survive and flourish only through the sustained commitment, faith, and hard work of its citizens. In the end,

*peace. We've witnessed the rise of democratic governments in predominantly Hindu and Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and Christian cultures. Democratic institutions have taken root in modern societies, and in traditional societies. When it comes to the desire for liberty and justice, there is no clash of civilizations. People everywhere are capable of freedom, and worthy of freedom.* ■

## MILESTONES

Hamid Karzai is Afghanistan's first democratically elected president, having gained more than 50 percent of the vote in defeating a field of 17 other presidential candidates.

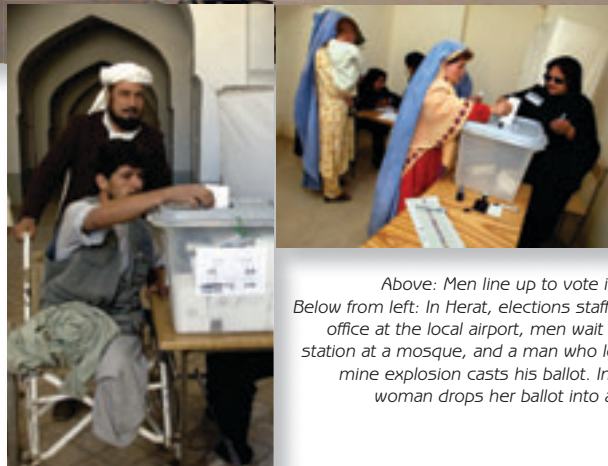
The road to Afghanistan's historic presidential elections began with the U.S.-led military campaign to defeat the Taliban and rid the country of its network of al-Qaida terrorists in October and November 2001.

A United Nations-sponsored conference in Bonn in December 2001 paved the way for creation of the Loya Jirga, or grand council, an interim government, and a new constitution.

By August 2004, more than 10 million voters had been registered in Afghanistan.

Afghans voted at some 4,000 polling stations throughout Afghanistan as well as in Iran and Pakistan.

The next milestone will be elections for the new parliament in spring of 2005, for which more than 30 political parties have been officially registered, according to media reports.



Above: Men line up to vote in Kandahar.  
Below from left: In Herat, elections staff count ballots at a U.N. office at the local airport, men wait in front of a polling station at a mosque, and a man who lost his legs in a 1993 mine explosion casts his ballot. In Kandahar, and a woman drops her ballot into a plastic box.

## PRIDE AND COURAGE:

# Afghanistan

The results of the presidential election in Afghanistan have now been officially certified, and the interim president, Hamid Karzai, is Afghanistan's first democratically elected president, having gained more than 50 percent of the vote against a field of 17 other presidential candidates.

On Election Day, Afghans lined up

at the polls in massive numbers and waited patiently for hours to cast their ballots.

The words of the Afghan people themselves are eloquent testimony to the meaning of this event:

"This is one of the happiest days of my life," said an elderly woman quoted in *The Times of London*. "I don't even care who wins. I just want



peace and security and to live long enough to come and vote again in five years' time."

"I cannot explain my feelings, just how happy I am," said Moqadasa Sidiqi, an Afghan refugee voting in Islamabad and quoted by the Associated Press. "I would never have thought I would be able to vote in this election."

Speaking to *The New York Times*, Muhammad Amin Aslami said, "In the whole history of Afghanistan this the first time we come and choose our leader in democratic process and free condition. I feel very proud and I feel very happy."

The United States and the international community, which assisted Afghan authorities in preparing for the elections, share in that pride.

The U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, recounted stories of a man who was carried to the polls on his sickbed, and of women who stood courageously in their lines despite an explosion some 100 yards from the polling station.

Secretary of State Colin Powell told another Election Day story: "The Taliban blew up a bridge, and the



Above: Women wait to vote in Herat.  
Below from left: Men prepare to vote at a polling station in Kandahar and receive voter registration cards in Kabul.

people came to the bridge and walked along the river till they found a place where they could cross that cold water to get to a polling station.”

International observers commented that, despite the threat of violence and unfamiliarity with administering a national election, the process was extremely orderly and that technical problems were relatively minor and would not call into question the outcome of the election. As one U.S. observer, Bernard Aronson, said:

*For a country that has gone through 25 years of extremely destructive warfare and civil strife, to conduct*

December, the United Nations sponsored a conference in Bonn, which laid out a roadmap for Afghanistan’s political transition to democratic rule.

Under the terms of the Bonn agreement, major Afghan factions formed an interim 30-member administration until the convening of a Loya Jirga, or grand council, in June 2002. The Loya Jirga chose an interim government and established procedures for adopting a new constitution.

Afghan officials distributed a new draft constitution to the country in



*an election like this under threat of violence from the Taliban and to carry it out so well, which included a sizeable vote among refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and a sizeable turnout of women, we think it’s a historic and tremendously hopeful achievement.*

The road to Afghanistan’s historic presidential elections and nascent democracy began with the U.S.-led military campaign to defeat the Taliban and rid the country of its network of al-Qaida terrorists in October and November 2001. In

June 2003, and throughout the fall, meetings were held at the local and provincial levels to select delegates to a Constitutional Loya Jirga, which met in December 2003. The delegates represented Afghans from every walk of life, geographic and ethnic group; more than 90 of the 500 delegates were women.

On January 4, 2004, after three weeks of debate and negotiation, the Loya Jirga approved Afghanistan’s new constitution.

The constitution establishes a strong presidency, with no prime minister, but two vice presidents.

*Photos above:  
Electoral officials sort ballots at a counting center in Kabul.*

The parliament, whose powers include a veto over senior official nominees, consists of an elected lower chamber (House of People) and an upper chamber (House of Elders) whose members are appointed in equal numbers by the president, by provincial councils, and by district councils. Roughly 27 percent of the seats in the lower chamber and 17 percent in the upper chamber will be reserved for women.

By August 2004, a combined Afghan-U.N. committee, the Joint Electoral Management Body, reported that more than 10 million voters had



been registered inside Afghanistan. By October, some 700,000 Afghan refugees had been registered, in Pakistan.

Afghans voted at some 4,000 polling centers throughout Afghanistan as well as in Iran and Pakistan. Afghan poll workers and monitors were joined by international observers from the United States, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Asian Network for Free Elections—all providing support to encourage fairness and transparency in the election process.

The next milestone on Afghanistan's road toward representative government will be parliamentary, provincial, and district elections, scheduled for spring 2005. Already, according to press reports, more than 30 political parties have been officially registered, with more than 60 parties seeking official recognition to run candidates for office.

No nation has traveled a harder road to freedom and democracy than Afghanistan. Today, however, its people can point with pride to the peaceful political process they have undertaken and to the success of their first democratic election as they look to a future of greater hope and freedom. ■

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